NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 466 NEW YORK, DECEMBER 2, 1905. **Price, Five Cents**

THE BEAUTIFUL PIRATE OF OYSTER BAY

OR NICK CARTER'S STRANGEST ADVENTURE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

Then, from behind them, he heard a burst of pealing laughter, and the voice of Scylla cried out: "Now the fireworks! Now! Now!"

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The Beautiful Pirate of Oyster Bay;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S STRANGEST ADVENTURE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE THEFT OF THE SUBMARINE.

"Chick!"

"Yes."

"Look at that and tell me what you think of it."

The detective and his chief assistant were facing each other across the width of a stateroom of a Pullman car, which was in turn attached to a train that had just pulled out of the station of the Pennsylvania Railroad in the city of Washington, bound for New York.

At the last moment before the train left the station, a messenger had dashed up to the car, leaped aboard of it, found Nick Carter in the stateroom as described, had pressed a sealed envelope into his hand, and, having shouted out the one word, "Important!" had leaped from the train again, into the yard.

Somewhat surprised by the manner of the delivery of the message, Nick Carter had waited a moment before breaking the seal of the envelope; and he had done this in order to make sure that the train upon which he had become a passenger had gathered sufficient headway so that he would not be expected to leave it as expeditiously as the messenger had done.

Now, having digested the contents of the note, he passed it to his assistant with the request as quoted above.

Chick spread the letter open before him and read as follows:

"DEAR NICK: This in great haste. Don't know if it will reach you in time. In any case will mail particulars by later train. Just received information that U. S. S. *Plunger* has mysteriously disappeared from her moorings in Oyster Bay. You are aware that the President went down in her for a dive last Friday, and that the official test before her acceptance by the government took place the following day. No more at present. No time. Full particulars follow by mail. You are to go direct to

the scene of the affair and take charge of the case. Particulars forwarded to you at that point.

"CONNERS,
"Acting Chief U. S. Secret Service."

Chick read the note through to the end twice before he gave it back to the detective.

"Well," asked Nick, "what do you make of it?"

"I should say, at first blush, that there is a large probability that the submarine has quietly sunk at her moorings," was the reply.

The detective shook his head in a very decided negative.

"Try again, Chick," he said. "The depth of the water where she has been moored does not exceed eighteen or twenty feet, even at high tide. If she had gone down there, she would easily have been discovered, even if she could not have been seen from the surface."

"It isn't likely that she has gone away on her own hook, is it?" asked the assistant.

"Hardly that."

"Then what do you make of the letter?"

"Merely what Conners has said; no more, no less."

"That she has mysteriously disappeared?"

"Exactly."

"But how in the world could such a thing as that be possible?"

"Well," replied the detective, meditatively, "there are, in fact, several ways in which it could be possible, although I will admit that there are few in which it could be probable."

"Humph!" said Chick, and was silent.

"There is a possibility," said the detective, "that her mechanism might have been started accidentally, by reason of a jar, and that in some such way she might have torn her way loose from her moorings. There is a possibility——"

"Say, Nick, you don't believe that, do you?"

"No; I am referring merely to possibilities."

"Humph!" said the assistant again.

"There is a possibility that she may have been ordered out of the bay by the navy department, and that the fact has not been communicated to the other departments of the government. You are aware that the secret service, as established in the vicinity of Oyster Bay, is——"

"You don't believe that either, do you?"

"No; I don't believe that, either."

"Well, what do you believe?"

"There is also a possibility that the President might have run away with her," said the detective, smiling.

"You are guying now."

"Perhaps I am. There is only one thing about the matter that I am at present willing to admit that I do know."

"What is that?"

"That Conners is one of the most thorough and careful officers in his department, and that he would not send me a message like this one unless he had good reason for doing so. You can bank upon it that the *Plunger* has disappeared, and that she has disappeared mysteriously. Now, with that much understood, it strikes me that the only thing for us to do is to carry out what we have been told to do, and in the meantime await the particulars which Conners has promised to send."

There was silence in the stateroom for a long time after that, during which the two men smoked on, each immersed in his own thoughts; and the silence was at last broken by Chick.

"Do you think that the boat might have been stolen?" he asked.

"On the face of it, I should say that it looks very much as if she had been stolen."

"But does not such a view of the case also appear utterly improbable?"

"Quite as much so as any other of the suggestions that have been made."

"Nick, has it ever occurred to you that there are times when you can be most confoundedly aggravating?" asked the assistant.

"I suppose that we all have that failing—at times; especially when we are absorbed by the subject of our thoughts."

"You have some sort of idea about this thing in your head, haven't you?"

"Not an idea in the world, Chick, that is really worthy of the name."

"But suppose she has been stolen——"

"Well?"

"Who could have stolen her?"

"Well"—the detective drawled out what he had to say in a most inimitable manner, so that the assistant smiled in spite of the fact that he was positive that his chief was guying him—"secret service agents for a new revolution in Venezuela might have stolen her; you know that some of the Venezuelans don't think any too much of the people up here; eh?"

"Bosh, Nick."

"Then, again, the Mikado of Nippon might have crossed the ocean in person and have gotten away with her; I am told that he is a surprisingly smart sort of a chap."

"Aw, say——"

"Then, again, I haven't a doubt that there are men in the Russian navy who, since the drubbing they received in the Japan Sea, might consider it an immortal act to find some such easy means of ridding the world of the whole Nipponese navy."

"Nick, I ask you again, very quietly, Who could have stolen her?"

"Frankly, Chick, I can think of only one person in all the world who would have conceived such an idea, and

who, having conceived it, would have the gall to carry it out."

"Who in the world——"

"And that person is a woman."

"Oh!"

"I mean Scylla, the Siren; better known as the Sea Robber. Scylla—the beautiful, the brave, the terrible, the heartless, the only woman I ever knew who was more to be dreaded than Zel, of the old days; than Dazaar, of three years ago; than any man or woman we have ever been pitted against. Has it occurred to you, Chick, what a resourceful criminal that woman is?"

"Often."

"She is more to be dreaded than was Dr. Quartz, although she has not the scientific knowledge that he possessed. She is more to be dreaded than was Dazaar, although she has not the unlimited wealth at her command which Dazaar possessed, nor is she such a fiend incarnate as was Dazaar. But she is a bad one; the worst I have ever known."

"Do you really suppose that Scylla could have done this thing?"

"I don't know what I suppose; but I will say this: If the *Plunger* has been stolen at all, Scylla is the only person in the world who, at the present moment, I can imagine as having the desire, the courage and the cheek—for no other word applies—to have done it."

CHAPTER II.

THE MANNER OF THE DISAPPEARANCE.

Instead of forwarding the particulars by mail, as Conners had said he would do, the acting chief of the secret service thought it best to go in person, for there was so little fact and so much that was pure surmise connected with the strange disappearance of the submarine that he found it next to impossible to make out a connected statement for the detectives to read.

Accordingly, when the train which bore the detective and his assistant toward New York was passing through Philadelphia a telegram was brought to the detective, which read:

"Am following you by special. Wait in station at Jersey City for me. Will arrive soon after you."

And Conners arrived according to program.

It was then evening, and as soon as the first greetings were over, Nick said to Conners:

"There is little or no use in our attempting to go to Oyster Bay to-night. In fact, I am rather of the opinion that we will not wish to go there at all, so let us go direct to my own house and discuss this matter. What do you say?"

"It is precisely what I was about to suggest," was the reply.

The three were driven rapidly to the residence of the detective, and, by mutual consent, the subject which interested them all so deeply was not mentioned again between them until they were safely ensconced in their chairs in the private study of the detective.

"And now," said Nick, "tell me all about it."

"That is the trouble," said Conners. "There is so little to tell."

"It is a fact that the boat has disappeared, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. There is no denying that."

"And she is not somewhere around there, at the bottom of the bay?"

"No; that is also a fact."

"Then we can accept it as a definite conclusion that she was stolen?"

"Without doubt."

"Now, what do you know about it?"

"Mighty little. When you left me, about noon to-day, I had not been alone but a few moments when a cipher dispatch was given to me. It took some time to read it, and from that I found the first information that I sent to you."

"Yes."

"I did that, in fact, as soon as I had gathered from the dispatch what had happened."

"Yes."

"And really before I had read the dispatch to the end."

"So I supposed at the time."

"Like my note to you, the dispatch told me that I would receive more particulars later, but when the second message came it told me no more of the particulars than the first one did, although it gave me a whole lot more of guesswork."

"So you decided to come on here yourself, by a special?"

"Yes."

"I am glad that you did so."

"Well, Nick, we have always worked rather well together, and I thought by putting our heads together we might get more out of this than in any other way."

"Precisely. Now, when did the boat disappear?"

"Some time not long before daylight this morning."

"Where was the regular crew?"

Conners smiled.

"Well," he said, "the answer to that question is about the only genuine particular that I have in my possession about the affair."

"Where was the crew?"

"You have altered the form of your question. In the first place you asked where was the regular crew, did you not?"

"Yes; and that is what I mean to ask now."

"Well, at two o'clock yesterday afternoon, the regular crew, to a man, was called away to a preliminary trial

and inspection of another boat of the same pattern; so, you see, the regular crew was not there."

The detective nodded his head and remained silent.

"Lieut. Nielson and his crew had proven themselves so efficient in the handling of their submarine that they were called upon to see what they could do with the other boat to which I have referred, which has not yet been named, and which has been somewhat obstreperous in her actions. It was thought that the crew of the *Plunger* might get onto the curves of the new boat more quickly than others could do so."

"I understand."

"And so, yesterday afternoon, they were ordered down to the navy yard to see what could be done."

"I see. And who was left in charge of the *Plunger?*"

"That is a point where it seems somebody erred, although it is difficult to tell who did so, at the present time."

"Well?"

"When the time came for the regular crew to leave there was nobody to take charge of the *Plunger.*"

"But, nevertheless, the lieutenant and his men were obliged to go."

"They had their orders. There was nothing else to do."

"They did not expect to be kept away, I suppose?"

"Not at all. It was their expectation to return the following day."

"Well, what happened then?"

"The hatches of the submarine were closed and locked. Near her, lying quietly at anchor, was an auxiliary yawl yacht called the *Siren*——"

"The what?"

"The *Siren.* Why?"

"Nothing. Go ahead."

"The *Siren* had been in that vicinity several days. She went there originally to observe the trials of the submarine, I suppose. Her owner is named Orford; a Mr. Raymond Orford; and when he discovered the dilemma that the lieutenant was in, he volunteered to lie by and keep tabs on the submarine until the return of the lieutenant and his crew, or until properly authorized officials appeared to do so."

"I begin to understand about what must have happened," mused the detective, half aloud.

"Well, possibly you do; I do not—yet, at least."

"Go ahead with the story."

"There isn't much more to it."

"I suppose not. I could almost finish it for you."

"Anybody could do that."

"You see," said Nick, "the *Plunger* was a good deal like an infernal machine which nobody other than those who understood her cared to touch, in the absence of the regular officers."

"Exactly."

"And while there were other naval officers on other craft in the bay——"

"The lieutenant could not call upon them very well, for two or three reasons. He could not ask to have them detailed from their regular duties; there was doubtless not one among them who would have cared to take the responsibility, and—— Well, I have no doubt that the *Plunger* was thought to be as safe as a church where she was lying."

"Nor I."

"With her hatches closed, it was not thought that anybody could get inside her, and nobody would care to do so, unless it might be some venturesome boys of the neighborhood."

"Precisely."

"With the hatches closed, there was nothing to be feared, even from them, and with a gentleman in a private yacht close at hand, to keep everybody off her—why, what was there to fear?"

"Not a thing in the world."

"Well, that is the story. She was lying there, in plain view of everybody, when darkness fell. There was one man who claims that he saw her still lying where she belonged as late as midnight——"

"Did that man, by any possibility, happen to be Mr. Raymond Orford?"

"Certainly. He is the man who saw her. He had agreed to keep a sort of watch over her, and he states that the last thing he did before he turned in for the night was to ascend to the deck of his own yacht and take a good-night look at the *Plunger.*"

"She was there, I suppose, as quiet as a lamb?"

"So he says."

"It was a stormy night about there, wasn't it?"

"Cloudy, drizzling, wet, windy, unpleasant—yes. Not what a sailor would call stormy."

"But dark, eh?"

"Dark as a pocket, I am told."

"In the morning the submarine was gone, eh?"

"Yes. Gone."

"And the only thing seen or heard of her since dark, the preceding night, was the report made by Mr. Raymond Orford, that he saw her about midnight?"

"Yes."

"Was any other vessel lying near her?"

"No; other craft was around the bay, but, as I understand it, the *Plunger* was in a half sheltered nook, some distance from them. The *Siren* was the nearest vessel to her."

"Conners," said the detective, suddenly changing the subject, "did I ever tell you that I owned a private yacht of my own?"

"No; you never did."

"You recall that case of mine about the Orloff ruby, don't you?"

"Sure."

"And the India rajah? Eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, that yacht that we captured at that time was presented to me in rather a peculiar manner, and as I have got a little more money than I used to have, I resolved to keep her for my vacations. She is called the *Nadja* now."

"I remember reading about her, Nick. But why do you refer to her just now?"

"Well, she happens to be in commission, and is, just at the present moment, lying off One Hundred and Fifteth Street. What do you say to my telephoning her to meet us at Twenty-third Street, and our taking a run up toward Oyster Bay? We ought to arrive there soon after midnight. I have a fancy, after all, that I would like to look over the ground a little."

"Just the thing."

"Chick," said the detective, turning to his assistant, "will you attend to it?"

Chick left the room without a word, and, not to deal with unnecessary detail of the story, suffice it to say that the *Nadja* arrived at Oyster Bay during the very small hours of the morning, having on board, in addition to her crew, Nick Carter, Philip Conners and Chick.

The *Nadja* entered the bay quietly and came to anchor as nearly as convenient to the yacht of Mr. Raymond Orford—called the *Siren;* for the name of this yacht, together with the part played by her owner in the mysterious disappearance of the *Plunger,* had interested the detective considerably more than he had admitted at the time.

The detective had expressed the hope that they would find that lights were still burning in the cabin of the *Siren* when they arrived, and in this they were not mistaken, and so he at once dispatched his first officer to the other yacht with the request that the owner of the *Siren* would come aboard the *Nadja* for a consultation in case it was at the moment inconvenient for him to receive the two detectives in his own cabin.

"A thousand to one," said Nick, as soon as his messenger departed, "that he comes aboard of us instead of receiving us aboard the *Siren.*"

"Why so?" asked Conners.

"Oh, it's a notion of mine. That's all," was the reply.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS MR. ORFORD.

But Nick Carter was, for once at least, mistaken, for it was only a short time before the officer who had been sent away returned with the reply that "Mr. Raymond Orford would be complimented if the gentlemen would accept the hospitalities of the *Siren* and her owner," etc., etc.

"You would have lost that bet, had I taken it, Nick," said Conners, with a grin.

"Yes, and the fact puzzles me a little, too," was the reply. "However, we will see—what we will see."

"Beyond a doubt."

They were rowed at once to the *Siren* and were received on board by the owner in person, who met them at the rail as they came over the side.

"It is rather an unusual hour to intrude upon you, sir," said Nick to him, as they came together, "but we felt that no time should be lost in obtaining what information you had to give us about this remarkable affair."

"Pray don't mention it, Mr. Carter—for I presume that you are Mr. Carter."

"Yes; and this is Mr. Conners, at present acting chief of the United States secret service."

"I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Conners. Is there not one more in your party? I understood your officer to say that there were three of you."

"He referred to my assistant," said Nick. "At present, he has decided to turn in. It was not necessary to force too many upon your hospitality, Mr. Orford."

"Not at all; not at all. All hours are much the same to me, and I am really delighted to have this opportunity for a visit from you. Time was hanging rather heavy upon my hands at the moment your messenger arrived, and I was actually engaged in a game of solitaire."

"Indeed!" said Nick.

They were, by this time, in the cabin of the yacht, and were hospitably directed to comfortable seats by their host, while at the same time the steward appeared with a plate of delicately made sandwiches, some bottles of wine of different kinds and a box or two of cigars.

"I beg that you will make yourselves thoroughly at home, gentlemen," said their host.

"You are, of course, aware of the object of our visit?" asked Nick.

"It is about the *Plunger,* of course; is it not?"

"Certainly. I am told that you were the last person who saw her—er—shall I say alive?"

"Alive would hardly be the word, would it?"

"That would depend upon whether she was actually stolen, or if she has gone on a cruise on her own account."

"I will confess," said Mr. Orford, with surprise in his manner, "that the latter possibility had not occurred to me."

"No?" said Nick.

"No. I had not thought about it. She was anchored, you know, and she couldn't very well slip her own cables, could she?"

"Did she slip her cables? Or, rather, was that the manner in which she left her moorings?"

"Why, yes. At least I have so understood."

"From whom, Mr. Orford?"

"Well, now that you ask me the question, I really am of the opinion that I have only had that idea in my own head. I really don't think it was suggested to me by anybody at all."

"Do you always keep a watch on your own decks at night, Mr. Orford?"

"I pretend to do so, Mr. Carter; but I cannot say that it is done."

"You mean that you are afraid that your watch sometimes falls asleep, or otherwise neglects his duty?"

"I am quite sure of it, sir. In fact, I do not know of a private yacht that is not subject to the same annoyance. How about your own craft?"

"I have never taken the trouble to find out. I leave that to my captain."

"Then, depend upon it, your watch sleeps as well as mine. There used to be a time when I had the idea that a private yacht could be operated with the same discipline and thoroughness as a man-of-war, but I have long since given up that idea. I used to get up in the night and go creeping about the deck to catch my men off duty; but I found that it was not worth while."

"No; I don't suppose it is."

"I am contented now to berth my vessel so that I know she is comparatively safe for the night, and to leave the rest to fate."

"Not at all a bad idea. But to return. What does your supposed watch say about the events of the night when the submarine disappeared?"

"I'll have them both up and you can question them for yourself, if you like, Mr. Carter."

"Oh, that will be unnecessary, at least for the present. I am satisfied that you have been thorough in your questioning."

"Indeed I have; but it all resolves itself to the point that I don't know anything about it. The watch who was on duty at the time when I went on deck myself, and saw her——"

"What time was that?"

"Very soon after eight bells. I should say, to be exact, that it was about five or ten minutes past midnight."

"You were about to say something about that particular watch, when I interrupted you."

"Yes; he saw her at the same time I did. I called his attention to the diver and told him to keep an eye on her throughout the night; but he replied that he was just about to turn in. He had not been relieved from duty then, although it was past the hour."

"I see. And what happened then?"

"Why, I turned about to return to the cabin, and as I did so I told him to tell the man who relieved him to watch the boat. That is all."

"And this other man—did you question him when it was found that the submarine had disappeared?"

"I did not, until late in the day. Then I sent for him."

"And what did he have to say?"

"He made the simple and rather forcible statement that he had not seen the submarine at all, since he turned in at eight bells of the evening watch."

"That is, at eight o'clock?"

"Yes."

"What did you think of that statement when it was made to you?"

Raymond Orford threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"I regarded it as the simple truth," he said.

"Do you mean to tell me that it is your belief that the *Plunger* disappeared almost at the moment that you and the first man saw her and spoke about her?" asked Nick.

"No, indeed! I mean to say that it is my belief that the second man came on deck very sleepy, and that he merely turned in alongside one of the boats and did not take the trouble to look from the deck of the *Siren* at all."

"In other words, that he did not fall asleep at his post, but that he tumbled down and went to sleep at once, eh?"

"Just that."

"I think I would make an effort to have better men than that sort in my crew, Mr. Orford."

The yacht owner shrugged his shoulders and indulged in an expression of dismay.

"What would you have?" he said. "Good men are difficult to obtain, at the best. When I succeed in securing a crew that is fairly good, I am satisfied to let well enough alone. I find that it saves me a lot of worry, don't you know?"

"I haven't a doubt of it. Did you happen to ask the man if he did go to sleep?"

"Certainly I did."

"And what reply did he make to that?"

"He denied it absolutely."

"How did he account for not seeing the submarine at all?"

"He does not attempt to account for it. He merely asserts that he did not see her."

"But if she was there he must have seen her, don't you think, if he were awake?"

"Oh, I don't know. He would not have seen her unless he had taken pains to search for her, for the night was very dark, and——"

"Do you mean to say that no light whatever was burning aboard the submarine, to warn others that she was there?"

"There certainly was no light aboard of her?"

"How was that? How did that happen?"

Again Orford shrugged his shoulders, and he could do it in an inimitable manner, too.

"My dear sir, you will have to ask the United States Navy about that," he said.

"Am I not correctly informed in that you had agreed to keep a sort of watch over the vessel?" asked Nick.

"Certainly. I did so."

"Then did you not consider it a part of your duty to see that some sort of a light was placed over her to indicate where she was moored?"

"Really, Mr. Carter," replied Orford, without the quiver of an eyelash, "if you thoroughly realized the situation, I do not think that you would ask that question."

"I should, nevertheless, be pleased to receive a reply," said Nick, imperturbably.

"Very well, I will give you one. I did not—and do not now—consider it a part of my duty to have done so."

"May I ask just why?"

"Principally because the position of the submarine, inside the *Siren*, did not seem to require it, and again because my general instructions regarding the matter were to allow no person to board the submarine in the absence of her officers. This I understood to include myself as well as others. It is certain that I did not feel at liberty to board her."

"Then you did not even consider the idea of placing a light upon her?"

"I did not."

"What is your personal opinion as to the time of her disappearance, Mr. Orford?"

"I think, as others do, that it happened sometime between midnight and daylight. I last saw her at midnight, and she was missed soon after daylight. Like yourselves, that is all I know about it."

"But you do think that she was stolen?"

"Until you suggested another reason for her disappearance, I had thought of no other explanation than that she was stolen."

"How long have you been in this harbor, Mr. Orford?"

"Since last Wednesday."

"You came, I suppose, to witness the trials of the submarine?"

"No; I came by accident. I did not know that such a submarine existed until after I dropped anchor here, then I determined to wait and see it all."

"May I ask if you are alone on the yacht? I mean, of course, with the exception of your regular crew?"

"I am so at the present time. It was not so when I arrived here. My wife and her sister were with me at that time."

"And they have now gone?"

"Yes; they left me yesterday about noon; or, I believe, to be exact, I should say it was the day before yesterday."

"I am very greatly obliged to you for your courtesy in receiving us at such a late hour," said the detective, rising, "and I think we will not detain you any longer tonight."

"I shall be at your disposal at any time, gentlemen."

"Thank you. It is more than likely that I shall wish to ask you a few more questions after I have gone a little more thoroughly into the matter. At present I can think of nothing."

The detectives took their departure then; but a little later, when they were again in the cabin of the *Nadja*, Nick turned suddenly to Conners.

"Do you know what I think, Phil? I think that the man Orford could at this moment, if he were so disposed, tell you the name of every individual who is at this moment aboard the stolen submarine. I think that the people who are aboard of her were first concealed aboard the *Siren;* and I think—or, rather, I don't think that he is a man at all. Your Mr. Raymond Orford is a woman, Connors."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PIRATE OF OYSTER BAY.

Conners bounded from the chair in which he had seated himself after their return.

"By Jove, Nick!" he exclaimed, and stopped.

"Well," said Nick, smiling. "Did you see it, too?"

"I saw it—but I didn't know that I did."

"Well, that is not surprising, for nobody could have been positive about it. I don't know that I should have cared to express such a positive opinion on the subject, if I did not have other reasons for holding the opinion."

"What reasons, Nick?"

"Wait. Don't let us get along too fast."

"Certainly not. That is the very thing we must avoid."

"If 'Mr.' Orford is a man, the disguise is about as thorough as any I ever saw."

"There can be no question about that, Nick."

"Again, the voice was quite masculine—quite as much so as many a tenor voice I have heard before now."

"That is true, too."

"But still again, you and I have often heard women's voices that were just as heavy; eh?"

"Sure thing."

"Think of the art of it, too, in wearing a smooth face, and not attempting to pass off a false beard or a false mustache on us; eh?"

"Nick," said Conners, thoughtfully, "if, while we were in the cabin of the *Siren*, I had had the opinions I have now, I should have arrested Raymond Orford then and there."

"On what charge, Conners?"

"As being a suspicious person, if nothing else."

"And had all your trouble for your pains. I thought of it, Conners, but I came to the decision that it would not do at all."

"Why not?"

"There are a good many reasons."

"Humph! I don't know about that."

"In the first place, there is not much likelihood—always

provided that our present idea is the correct one—that we will ever get on the track of the *Plunger* again, unless we are directed to her wrecked hulk, or unless some person leads us to her."

"I shouldn't wonder if you are right about that."

"Of course that is the correct view. If she was stolen at all, and it now seems to be beyond a doubt that she was, there is only one person in the world whom I think would have taken her, and that is Scylla, the Siren."

"Scylla, the Siren! By Jove! I remember! The sea robber of New York harbor, eh? And, say—the Siren! Why, that is the name of the yacht out there."

"Sure."

"Gee, Nick! Let's go back."

"Where?"

"To the *Siren.*"

"What for?"

"To arrest that man-woman, or that woman-man, Orford."

The detective shook his head.

"It won't do," he said.

"Why not?"

"It will be altogether too precipitate. It won't do."

"But——"

"I admit that she may have taken the alarm by what we did to-night, and be gone in the morning, but we've got to take our chances with that."

"She can't get away with the *Siren.*"

"No; but she can go without her."

"That is rather a valuable vessel to leave in such a manner."

"Nonsense! It is more than likely that the *Siren* is chartered. Or, if she is not, what does her value count as against what they can easily obtain with such a vessel as the *Plunger* under them?"

"That is right. Nothing at all."

"The *Plunger* could send the *Kearsarge* to the bottom without half trying. It will be no trouble for her to capture all the vessels she wants. This is why Scylla wanted her."

"Say, Nick, you don't think that this woman whom we thought was a man, was Scylla herself, do you?"

"No; I know better than that."

"You captured Scylla once, didn't you?"

"No; she captured me."

"But I understood that later you got her."

"Well, I didn't. I got her sister instead. It was a mixed up mess all around. I think I must have worked it badly. At all events, Scylla is alive and as much at large to-day as she ever was, and, in my opinion, she is at this moment aboard that submarine."

"We've got the *Nadja* in which to chase her."

"But the *Nadja* cannot chase her to the bottom of the sea; that is, if she does happen to try on such a thing, she cannot return to the surface again. There is only one way to recapture the *Plunger.*"

"How is that?"

"Through strategy. It can be done in no other way."

"And that is why you do not want to make the break of arresting Orford to-night, eh?"

"Exactly. Chick!"

"Yes."

"It is rather chilly to send you out to take a bath, but I don't know but it ought to be done."

"I was on the point of suggesting the same thing myself."

"All right. I don't suppose you need any instructions do you?"

"Not one, thank you."

Chick slipped away and disappeared.

"Have you sent him over to the *Siren?*" asked Conners.

"Yes."

"How will he get there?"

"Swim."

"But you did not tell him to arrest Orford or to shadow him, or what to do, in case there should be some move made over there before morning."

"I didn't have to; he will know what to do. He knows now what I wish him to do."

"Well, you might as well tell me also."

"Why, if our friend Orford, whom we now both think is a woman, should attempt to leave the *Siren* during the hours of darkness, Chick will simply follow, that is all."

"But he won't have hardly any clothing. He will be spotted——"

"Trust Chick for all of that. And now, if you don't mind, I'm going to turn in."

"I'm not. I'm going on deck to keep my weather eye on the *Siren.*"

"I wouldn't take the trouble to do that."

"Why not?"

"Because a little good rest will do you a heap more good. That is the only reason. If you prefer to cool your heels on deck, by all means do so. Good-night."

The detective turned away and entered his own cabin, where he was soon sleeping soundly, for he was one of the kind that could always disabuse his mind of anything that happened to be troubling it, if the necessity for rest arose.

Conners was made of different stuff, however.

He could not have dropped asleep as Nick Carter did, if his life had depended upon it, at just that time. The entire excitement of the day had gotten upon his nerves, and he felt as if his entire body was in a tingle; and so he lighted a cigar and went upon the deck, taking care to keep well out of sight behind the charthouse—that is, so much that the fire of his cigar could not be seen from the decks of the *Siren*—while he still maintained a posi-

tion from which he could look off toward her through the darkness.

Everything seemed perfectly quiet aboard both vessels, and in the entire harbor, for that matter.

Conners wished that he had gone with Chick.

Then, after a little, he wished that something might happen aboard the *Siren* which would be an excuse for him to leap into the water and swim to the assistance of Chick; and then, finding that his own impatience was becoming unbearable, he determined to slip into the water and swim over to the yacht himself, even if he accomplished nothing more in doing so than in cooling his nerves.

He slipped again into the cabin.

He had seen that Chick obtained a set of trunks for use in the water from a certain locker, and he had an idea that he could find others there.

In this he was not mistaken, and having possessed himself of what he wished, he returned to the deck, and was soon ready for his plunge into the water.

It was not a long swim to the *Siren,* and he had no difficulty in making it; nor in reaching the deck of the vessel after he had done so.

He climbed upon the yacht over the bows, and as he had half expected, not a sound or a suggestion of movement met his senses of sight and hearing.

After waiting a while to assure himself that he had not been heard, he began slowly to make his way aft.

He recalled all that had been so recently said about the watch on deck, and he searched narrowly for signs of one; but without result, and he arrived at the cabin without having heard a sound or obtained a view that would have suggested that there was another person than himself alive aboard the vessel.

Here, he listened intently.

It did occur to him that if Chick were maintaining his watch as carefully as he should be doing, the assistant would see or hear his own approach, and that there would be some exchange of signals between them.

But Chick was as absent from sight and sound as was the mysterious Mr. Orford.

Conners lingered around the cabin for a long time. He listened at the door, and at the windows.

Once, he even went so far as to push the cabin door slightly ajar, and to step partly inside, and then it occurred to him that he was making a fool of himself, and interfering with the duties of another, and he withdrew with some disgust.

"I reckon that I'll follow Nick's example," he muttered, "and return to the *Nadja* and go to bed. That is what I should have done in the first place."

He stole quietly away then, returned to the bows of the vessel and managed to let himself down quietly into the water.

A little later, he stole aboard the *Nadja,* feeling rather sheepish for what he had done, made his way as quietly as possible toward the cabin.

But he had not quite reached the door of the cabin when he came face to face with Nick Carter, who stepped out upon the deck directly in front of him.

"You caught me at it, didn't you, Nick?" he asked.

"Where have you been?" was the quick reply.

"Aboard the *Siren.*"

"Is all quiet there?"

"As quiet as the grave."

"I am glad of that. My dream was a dream, after all. What did Chick have to say?"

"Chick didn't have anything to say, old man."

"Why not?"

"For the very good reason that he wasn't there; or, at least, if he was there, I didn't see him."

"Not there? Didn't see him? That's funny," muttered the detective.

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE DEATH TRAP.

"Tell me just exactly what you did do," said the detective, after a pause. And then Conners recounted all that had occurred from the moment he had parted with Nick, until they encountered each other again at the door of the cabin.

"Do you mean that there was not a sign of life aboard that craft?" asked Nick.

"Sure. Just that."

"But where was Chick all the time you were there?"

"You can search me. If you had given him specific instructions before he departed on his errand I might have thought it strange that I saw nothing of him, but as it was, I thought it likely that he had climbed a mast, or was perched on a cloud, or something of that kind, and so concluded that I was just a fool for bothering my head about it."

"Conners, I wish you had gone inside that cabin."

"I did—for about a yard."

"And what did you see then?"

"Just what I saw when we went into it together, two hours before, save for the fact that there was only one dim little light burning."

"And what did you hear?"

"Not a blooming thing."

"Conners!"

"Yes."

"Something has happened over there."

"Think so?"

"Yes. Go and get into your clothes while I rouse some of the men cautiously. The gig is in the water yet, and I think I will take chances on making another visit to the *Siren.*"

"I'll be with you in three minutes," said Conners.

When he returned, Nick was awaiting him. He had roused two of his men, and they were in the boat at the oars, and in this manner they pulled silently toward the *Siren.*

"Shall you hail, or will you board her without?" asked Conners, as they drew near.

"I hardly think that a hail would be answered," was Nick's significant reply.

"Why not?"

"Because I've got a hunch that there is not now a living soul alive, aboard that vessel."

"Eh? You don't mean it!"

"I do, though."

"But where, then, is Chick?"

"God knows! That is what woke me up. I had a dream about him. I thought that he was standing above some sort of an infernal machine that was just about to explode, and that the woman, Scylla, had lighted the fuse that was to set it off; and it seemed as if she were standing there grinning at me all the time I was dreaming."

"You don't mean to say that you believe in dreams, do you?"

"Sometimes I think they are significant of what might happen; a sort of subconscious premonition of which one has not taken full cognizance at the proper time. Anyhow, this one awakened me. I think I should have paid no further attention to it if you had not been to the *Siren,* and returned at that instant to report to me. That looked like a coincidence."

"So it did. I will begin after a little to think that you are——"

"Hush! Here we are."

Nick did not wait to hear the conclusion of Conners' remark, nor scarcely to give an order to the men.

With a bound he leaped into the chains and swung himself aboard the yacht.

Once upon the deck, he disappeared instantly toward the cabin house, and Conners, who had followed him closely, could see only a gleam of light as the detective ran toward the stern of the vessel; but he knew by that that the detective had thrown caution to the winds and had brought his electric searchlight lantern into use.

Conners drew his own revolver and darted after the detective.

He saw the former leap into the cabin and he sprang after him; he saw Nick disappear through a door in the bulkhead toward the waist of the vessel, and he darted after him again, for by this the excitement of the moment had taken possession of him as well, and he would not have been surprised at that instant to have come upon an infernal machine in the middle of the deck, ready to explode.

But he could not overtake Nick Carter for all that, and he did not until he heard the detective call to him from far ahead in the darkness.

In another moment, however, he came upon him, and then the acting chief of the secret service paused in utter dismay at what he saw before him.

And well he might do so!

Chick was bound fast in a chair against a stanchion in the woodwork of the vessel; before him, on the deck, was a plate of solid iron two inches in thickness and more than a foot square, while upon the iron plate was arranged half a dozen sticks of dynamite, each a pound in weight. In the midst of these sticks were half a dozen cartridge percussion caps, while directly above them hung, suspended by a thread, a six-pound weight such as butchers employ in the use of steelyards. From the stanchion to which Chick was bound, to another, across the vessel from him, had been stretched a wire, and to this was fastened a common piece of punk in such a manner that one end of it came in contact with the thread that supported the weight.

The whole story was plainly to be seen at a glance.

The punk would have burned slowly to the thread; it would have lighted the thread, which would instantly have parted and dropped the weight upon the cartridges; they, in turn, would have exploded the dynamite which was not two feet directly in front of where Chick, in the armchair, was bound to the stanchion.

More than two-thirds of the punk had burned through, and Nick figured that it must already have been burning more than an hour, so that there was still about half an hour to spare before the explosion would have taken place when Nick Carter arrived upon the scene.

But it had been a terrible hour for Chick.

He had had no idea of being saved.

He knew the methods of his chief so well, that he had no doubt, during that awful hour, that Nick Carter had gone quietly to bed and was sleeping calmly and trustfully in the belief, not only that Chick was well able to take care of himself, but also to accomplish all that had been expected of him as well.

He believed that the very first intimation that the detective would obtain of his awful plight would be when he was awakened by the terrible explosion that was sure to follow—an explosion which would not only so utterly tear him to pieces that not a vestige of him would ever be found, but which also would destroy the *Siren,* and doubtless the *Nadja* as well.

Nick Carter, in some manner which he was never fully able to explain, was led directly to the spot where the danger lay. He could only account for it by the sympathy which existed between him and Chick. In a word, he only thanked God that some unseen Hand had directed him.

For a moment after Conners arrived upon the scene, it was difficult to tell who was the whitest of the three;

and Conners was the first to break the silence that followed, after the punk had been taken down and extinguished, the cartridges stowed safely away where they could do the least harm, the dynamite was wrapped in bagging and put aside, the weight removed and Chick released; and all this was done in a twinkling, so rapidly did Nick and Conners act.

"Faith," he exclaimed, lapsing into a touch of the brogue as he always did when he was very much in earnest, "I'll belave in dreams after this, so I will!"

Nick laughed aloud, more to relieve his feelings than for any other reason.

"It was strange, wasn't it?" he said.

"The strangest ever," said Conners; for Chick still remained silent. He felt that he preferred listening to talking at that moment. "Anyhow, Chick, lad, you're out of it. Sure, that varmint of a woman is a bad one, if anybody should ask ye about it. How did ye get into the pickle, lad?"

"I walked right into it; or, rather, I swam into it."

"Swam into it? How is that?"

"They were waiting for me on the deck when I climbed aboard."

"Waiting for ye, were they?"

"Yes; they must have kept watch from the moment that you two left this vessel, and so, of course they saw me swimming toward them, later, although I tried to keep well out of sight."

"It is a bad thing to kape out of sight when nobody is lookin', lad, and quite another to do it when there are a whole lot av eyes watching you. Sure, I've found that out," said Conners, sententiously.

"Tell us about it, Chick," said Nick, quietly.

"I swam direct for the bow, thinking that it was the safest place to come aboard."

"Yes."

"There was neither sight nor sound of any person anywhere around, and I had not the least idea that I had been seen."

"No; the report you had from us about our visit here would have given you that assurance."

"It did."

"Well?"

"When I found all so quiet, I had no hesitation whatever. I climbed aboard."

"Straight into their arms, eh?"

"Straight into a net. They captured me as they would have snared a bird. They simply threw a seine over my head and hauled it, that's all. I never realized before what it meant to feel like a string of suckers, but I know now what it means to feel like a——"

"A lobster? Eh, Chick?" said Conners.

"I was going to say a herring, or a shad, or something like that, but it's all one."

"What next, Chick? Who caught you?" asked Nick.

"There were only four of them; all that were left on the boat, I think."

"I think so, too. Were they men or women?"

"Men. At least, they wore men's clothing, and they talked like men, although the one who stood at one side and gave the orders, was, I think, the captain, whom you met."

"'Mr.' Orford, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, what then?"

"They hauled me aft on the deck after whipping a line around my neck and choking me so that I could not make a sound, and in a moment I was in the cabin with the door shut; but they didn't stop even there, for it is evident that they didn't want a sound to get out, and they knew that if I got a chance to holler, I would do it."

"And then——"

"They brought me here. When they undertook to take me out of the net in order to tie me, I, realizing that there were only four of them all told, thought I might make a break for liberty, but say, I hadn't made a move before that fiend of a woman in man's clothes, stepped up and hit me a whack over the head with the butt of a pistol that knocked the senses clean out of me, and I didn't know another thing until I opened my eyes and found them fixing that infernal machine in front of me.

"'We will not do you the honor to let you suppose that all this material is entirely for your benefit,' said the woman—and she no longer tried to disguise the fact that she was a woman, for her voice gave her away at once. 'The arrangements for blowing up the vessel to-night were all made before you came aboard. Now that you are here, you may as well have the benefit of it.'

"I made no answer, and after a little, she added:

"'You see, we had made up our minds to go. We might have taken the *Siren* with us, only that she is an old hulk hired for the purpose, and made presentable with a little paint and less furniture, placed where it was likely to be seen. It was unfortunate—for you—that you selected to-night for your call.'

"'What is all that rig for, anyway?' I asked her, pretending that I did not understand.

"Then she explained the thing to me elaborately."

"What did she say?" asked Nick. "Tell me everything."

"She said that they wanted a time fuse, and so they invented one. She said that the punk was about as sure a thing as she knew of, and that with the hold closed, the smell of it could not get out. She explained that it would burn about two hours, as nearly as she could figure, but that it might last a trifle longer, or not quite as long; she could not tell exactly.

"'At least,' she added, 'you will be given sufficient time to make your peace with all the powers you believe

in, and I think there is very small chance that you will be rescued.

"'I think I know Nick Carter and his methods well enough,' she added, 'to feel assured that when he sent you here, he went quietly to sleep to await the result of your report.'"

"She was almost right about that; eh?" said Nick.

"She wasn't quite right, at all events," responded Chick.

"Go ahead with your story, lad."

"'Are you Scylla?' I asked her, then; and she laughed in my face.

"'My dear young man,' she said to me, 'your ingenuousness would be charming if it were only real, but that, like other things, I find, can be counterfeited. Let it satisfy you to believe that I am Mr. Raymond Orford, owner of the *Siren*.'

"'And what about the *Plunger*?' I asked her. 'You may as well tell me, now that you are going to blow me sky high.'

"'Bottom deep would be a more appropriate expression,' she said; and then she added: 'I am not one of those weak-minded mortals who blab. Tell that to your chief, if you ever see him again.'

"She thought a moment, and then she added, half to herself:

"'I did not expect Nick Carter here so soon, or I should have been gone before he arrived; and there is no reason why I should not tell you that he really startled me when he appeared so suddenly on the scene to-night. It is well for him and for all of us that he did not make the attempt to arrest me in my own cabin.'

"'Why?' I asked.

"'Because I should have blown him, myself, these good men and that wild Irishman of a secret service chap into kingdom come at the first sign. I was prepared to do that at any instant, and I sat all the time where he could not have prevented it.'"

"I reckon she meant that, Nick," said Conners.

Nick Carter nodded.

"Go on, Chick," he ordered. "Is there anything more?"

"Yes; when she was going away she let the others go out ahead of her, and then she turned and came back to me. For a moment I actually thought she was going to relent, and set me free, or shoot me, or something; but after a little, she just laughed, a low, chuckling sort of a laugh, and she said:

"'You and Nick Carter have such a way of escaping from impossible places, that I am by no means assured that you will die here. If you do not, and if you should ever see him again, alive, you can tell him for me that it will be better for him if he forgets that there ever was such a vessel as the *Plunger*.'

"She looked at me a minute after that. Then she said good-night, very quietly, and went out."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST OF THE "SIREN."

An inspection of the *Siren* made by the three men immediately after that, developed the fact that there was scarcely anything aboard of her that was of value.

More than that, she was an exceedingly old vessel—one which had no doubt been purchased and revamped for the purpose in view; and this, once the hulk had been obtained, had not been difficult.

A few coats of paint spread where it would do the most good; a few expensive fittings, to fill in the places where strange eyes might encounter them; the old name painted out and a new one substituted; a comfortably stacked larder, and the thing was done.

After that it had only remained for the owners, or conspirators, or whatever you please to call them, to conceal on board the persons who were to take part in the consummation of the plot and so to await the necessary opportunity.

"Do you suppose it was possible," Conners asked of Nick, while the examination was going on, "that these conspirators could have been forewarned of the probability that the regular crew of the *Plunger* would be called away from its duty, as they were?"

"I have heard of leaks in other departments of the government," replied Nick, dryly. "I should say that the idea is worth investigation. It seems incredible that they would make such extraordinary preparations for their adventure unless they had obtained a definite hope of its success."

And so, the *Siren* told its own silent story of the plot and its consummation.

The bare hold; the old and worn-out engine, barely safe to use at all; the utter dearth of furnishings anywhere save where there was a possibility that strangers might penetrate; the entire air of the whole vessel, related a mute tale of the plot from the moment of its inception.

When the examination was finished the three men seated themselves in the cabin, in much the same positions that had been occupied when the call had been made upon the supposed owner, and it was Chick who asked:

"Would it be well for me to go ashore at once and find out if there is any trace of the people who have escaped from here?"

But the detective shook his head in an emphatic negative.

"You might as well look for them at the North Pole," he said.

"Why so?"

"Because, lad, they have not gone ashore at all."

"Eh? Not gone ashore?" said Conners.

"No."

"Where, then?"

"To the *Plunger.*"

"Great Scott! you don't mean to suggest that the submarine returned to this harbor during the night in order to take them off, do you?"

"Something very much like that; yes."

"You think that she came back after them?"

"Without a doubt."

"What makes you so certain of it?"

"Because it was by far the easiest, the surest and the safest way for them to escape."

"I guess that's so, too. Only I don't see why that woman who played the part of Orford, and the three men whom Chick says were with her, should have waited until now to escape. Why in blazes didn't they go out with the *Plunger* in the first place?"

"That isn't an easy question to answer; and at all events it is not important. Still, my idea is that they had all the passengers they cared to carry on the first trip out, and possibly also it was thought best for other reasons to leave somebody behind to find out definitely what it was proposed to do to capture them."

"Well, I don't see that they have found it out very definitely."

"Oh, yes, they have. They know that you and I are both hot on the trail; but they know one thing that is still more important to them, and that is that we already know who it was who cut out the *Plunger* in this manner."

"I see the point."

"That particular knowledge doubtless alters their plans somewhat; or, at least, it decides them between two courses, either of which they might have adopted in another case."

"Well, what is the next move, Nick?" asked Conners, after a pause. "I think I will ask you to boss this job."

"The next move, Conners, is to return to the *Nadja,* and to get under weigh."

"Leave the port, do you mean?"

"Certainly."

"And let those who may find the *Siren* in the morning, and when they have found her, think what they please?"

"No; I propose to take the *Siren* in tow, and I think you will agree with me that it is what should be done with her."

"What in thunder will you do with her after you get her; eh?"

"It makes very little difference what we do with her so long as we take her out of this harbor, but it seems plain to me that all that can be done to keep this thing quiet should be done. It is not a pleasant thing for the chief executive to have things happening under his nose. If the *Siren* has disappeared, she will simply be thought to have sailed in the night and that will be the end of it so far as she is concerned. If we leave her here, the newspapers will have pages about the whole affair, and that, I take it, is what we wish to avoid."

"By Jove, Nick!"

"What is secret service for, if it is not for secret service?"

"You are right."

"You can bet your life that at the present moment the only people who have heard a word about the *Plunger* affair are those who are directly concerned in it. The newspapers won't get a smell of this business, unless I am greatly mistaken."

"Unless the *Plunger* is entirely lost, and the people who have captured her, make a noise about it."

"We must never admit for a moment that she is entirely lost. We must recapture her."

"Easier said than done, old man."

"I'll admit that all right; and yet it should not be so difficult to do, either."

"Eh? Not difficult?"

"The *Plunger* is a small craft, Phil."

"I grant you that."

"Moreover, she cannot remain for a very long time under water. Like some other amphibious monsters, she must come to the top to breathe."

"Sure thing."

"We must put our heads together and figure out about where she will do that."

"Huh! That sounds easy, doesn't it?"

While they were talking, they had returned to the *Nadja* and now ascended to the deck of the detective's yacht, where he at once gave orders that the *Nadja* was to be got under weigh at once, that a line was to be passed to the *Siren,* her cables slipped, and that she was to be towed toward the Connecticut shore, until further orders.

Then they went into the cabin.

"Now, Conners," said the detective, "we know, to start with, that the *Plunger* has been quite near to us to-night. She has been at or near the mouth of this bay, or just outside it."

"What of all that?"

"Wait. We know that a heavy southeast wind is blowing outside."

"There isn't the least doubt about that."

"We know that the *Plunger* is not built for that sort of weather, and that on the surface it would pound her around so that it would be almost impossible to live inside her."

"Humph! Well, you are getting at it."

"We know that a southeast wind gets a pretty full

sweep through this part of the Sound, and that since it would be impracticable for the *Plunger* to cross the Sound on the surface of the water, and impossible for her to achieve that distance in safety—particularly in charge of persons who are not used to her—under the water, that therefore she will not attempt to reach the Connecticut shore."

"Well?"

"So we know that she will head eastward from here."

"Oh! do we? I don't see why. What is to prevent her from going in the opposite direction; eh?"

"There is Hell Gate, for one thing. She couldn't get through there in the darkest night without being spotted. Then there is the East River, and—— Oh, well, she wouldn't try to go that way."

"Probably not."

"And she can't go south without going overland; so there remains but one point of the compass which she can select with any degree of safety."

"It occurs to me," said Chick, at this juncture, "that she won't go very far to the westward on such a night as this one, either."

"So it does to me," replied Nick; "but all the same, tell me why you think so?"

"Because after she passed that point—I forget it's name—that juts out just this side of Northport, she would run into a sea that would be as bad, or worse, than the one she would encounter out in the middle of the Sound."

"Right, Chick. She would. And therefore——"

He paused to allow Chick to finish.

"Therefore, she will put into Huntington Bay, or she will go a little further and run in toward Centerport. There is a good harbor there, and quite deep, too."

"And that," said Nick, "is where I am inclined to think she will elect to lay by for the night. In fact, I haven't a doubt that she has been somewhere in one of those localities since she was taken out of this bay, and if we had put our heads together a little sooner, we might have saved considerable time."

"The next thing you will do, Nick," said Connors, in assumed disgust, "will be to tell us the exact spot where she will be anchored."

"Even that," replied the detective, smiling. "I think it will not be difficult to select the spot, when once we are near enough to make a selection. All you have to do is to consider what you would do if you were aboard the *Plunger* and had to take care of her; if your head and neck and life depended upon your care of her, and if at the same time you were no more accustomed to handling her than are the people who are now aboard of her. There is one thing certain, Conners, that you haven't considered."

"What is that?"

"We have got to recapture the *Plunger* before this particular day passes, or we will never get her at all."

"Do you mean that?"

"Certainly I mean it."

"Then what are you going to do with the old hulk behind us?"

"I'm going to drag it out into the Sound, scuttle it, set fire to it, and cast it adrift."

"But——"

"With big holes in her bottom, with the fire inside her and with that dynamite ready to explode as soon as we are a safe distance away, there will be no danger; and the *Siren* will have disappeared as mysteriously as they intended her to do. And then, my dear Conners, if we just have a little luck—if we can only find the *Plunger*, recapture her and tow her back to her old anchorage, the world will never know that she has been in alien hands."

"Unless those publishers of yours tell about it; eh?" said Conners, with a grin.

"Oh, well," replied Nick, with a shrug, "that is Chick's business; and, anyhow, such a story will appear so long after the actual event that only a few of us will realize that it is true; the rest will believe it to be romance."

"Huh!" said Conners.

"And now," added the detective, "it is time to go aboard the *Siren* and prepare to send her to the bottom. Chick, I think I will delegate that job to you, so take half a dozen men with you, and get about it."

CHAPTER VII.

A HARD GAME TO BE UP AGAINST.

A great deal had happened since midnight, as the reader is aware; but it had all happened so swiftly that it yet wanted more than an hour of daylight when Chick, with the men placed at his disposal, pulled away from the side of the *Nadja* toward the *Siren*.

The latter vessel was still in tow, but the *Nadja* had been headed into the wind under the high bluff which is locally known as Chieftain's Head, and with her engines just revolving, she held the *Siren* almost stationary.

It was half an hour later when he returned, and Nick, who was on deck awaiting him, started with some surprise when he discovered that there was one person in the boat who had not been present there when it pulled away.

"Who have you there?" he called out to his assistant; but the latter did not reply until he was safely on the deck, and the *Nadja* was again dashing away through the water, this time with no impediment to her speed in the shape of a tow.

Then he reported rapidly, as follows:

"The *Siren* is afire from stem to stern, inside," he said. "In a few moments she will burst into flame, and

it won't be long after that before she blows up. There is enough ballast and weight of engines and boilers to sink her at once when that happens. I cast off the tow-line at once——"

"We have already hauled it in. Now, what about this man?" demanded the detective, turning his eyes toward the prisoner, who had been taken to the cabin with them.

"I heard a groaning," replied Chick. "I followed the sound, and discovered this man bound so that he could not move. He had been buried under a heap of rubbish in the hold where we did not think it necessary to search when we were aboard the *Siren;* but he had managed to chew through the rope that gagged him so that he could make a sound when he heard me return. He is one of them, and he has a story to tell you. He says that he can take you directly to the spot where the *Plunger* was to go into hiding for a week, in case they succeeded in getting away with her."

"Then we are certainly in luck," was the detective's comment. "Now, sir, who are you?" he added, turning to the man, whose face was covered with blood from his gashed lips, where he had bitten them in gnawing through the rope that had been used as a gag.

The man could scarcely utter a word that could be understood without difficulty, but in detailing his story, we will eliminate all that.

"I was one of Scylla's crew," he replied. "My name is Thompson. I threatened to peach on the whole thing, and so they left me where I was found, to go down with the ship. I think it was supposed that I was dead at the time."

"No doubt. You look as if they might have thought so. How many are there in that crew?"

"All told, without me, twelve, sir."

"Good! Now, before you say another word, tell me where we are to find them. After that we will get at the particulars. I want to say this, however: If through you the *Plunger* is rescued, not only shall all your past misdeeds be forgotten, but you shall be rewarded, and given a chance to start new in life—and no questions asked. Now, how shall we head?"

"Do you know the shallow bay where there are several small islands and one large one along the coast between Northport and Stony Brook, sir?" asked the man.

"Yes; I know them well."

"Capt. Scylla has got a big house and a lot of outbuildings on one o' them islands, sir."

"Well?"

"One of the buildings is a boathouse. From the water it appears only big enough to hold an ordinary launch, but she has had the rocks blasted out until there is quite a harbor inside that air building. The land'ard end of the building is covered with rocks and dirt and a few trees so's it don't look anything like as big as it is, and under that she has had it all dredged out till it will easily take in the *Plunger,* or even a much bigger craft than she is."

"That was a masterly idea of hers," mused the detective; but the man thought the remark was addressed to him, and he replied to it.

"Yes, sir, it was. You see, sir, when she began it, she had no idea that she would ever capture the *Plunger,* or anything like her, but she did have an idea that she would build a low and a swift boat that would come pretty near to doing what she'll do, and so she made this island place of hers ready for it. Loon Island, she calls it."

"And you think that is where they have taken the *Plunger?*" asked the detective.

"I'm dead certain of it, sir."

"Well, now tell me about the change in her plans."

"Well, sir, I don't know much about all that. I don't really suppose that anybody does except her own self, for she is a close-mouthed mortal, if ever there was one; but, sir, it wasn't long ago when she sends for me, and asks me if I has sand to join in with her in the capture of a government submarine. I told her I was ready if she was, and then she tells me that a friend of hers in Washington has told her that on a certain day the crew of the *Plunger* will be absent from their vessel, which is moored in Oyster Bay, and that we're to take the old *Petrel*—which is the *Siren,* sir—and go and git the *Plunger.* I reckon as how you about know the rest, sir, for that is about all that I can tell you."

"Were you associated with her in the old days when she had a lot of women pirates under her command?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir. But only on the island and aboard the old *Petrel.* But you 'r somebody pinched all that outfit, and she had to fall back again onto us, and I reckon she was mighty glad to do it. We was a-painting that old hulk like mad—the *Petrel,* sir—a-getting her ready, after we know'd about this new lay; and there you have it, sir."

"How many men are there on the island, beside the crew; eh?"

"Three or four; but they ain't no good. You needn't be afeard of them. They won't put up any fight to amount to anything."

"I suppose she relies principally upon concealment and secrecy to protect herself from discovery, doesn't she?"

"I suppose she does, sir. You see, she is known all around that part of the coast as a good old lady; and——"

"Old lady!"

"That's the part she plays there, sir."

"I see. Go on."

"She is the last one they would suspect around there of doing anything wrong, and with everything fixed the

way she has got it now, there was really nothing for her to fear."

"What did she intend to do with the *Plunger?*"

"Just be a common pirate, sir. She claims that she is a direct descendant of Capt. Kidd, but between you and me, sir, her ancestors were just common lunatics, for that is what she is, although she is beautiful and young, and all that. But she is a devil when she once gets a-going, and no mistake."

The detective turned toward Conners.

"A lunatic; a crazy woman," he said. "Conners, that explains it all, doesn't it?"

Conners nodded, and the detective turned again to Thompson.

"I suppose you know the waters around that island thoroughly, do you not?"

"I've know'd 'em all my life, sir."

"When she rounds the point to head toward her island, she will encounter a heavy sea. Do you think she can make the island direct, without laying by anywhere?"

"She's a ripping good sailor, sir."

"That's all right, but she is sailing a different kind of craft from any that she has ever tackled before."

"Bless you, sir, that won't make the slightest difference to her."

"Then you think that she will make straight for the island and for the boathouse you have described?"

"There isn't the least doubt of it, sir."

"Tell me how that boathouse is situated."

"It is directly between two high bluffs, sir, and the water there is deep and clear. If she can make the island by daylight, she won't have any difficulty in getting inside the shelter without being seen."

"And there is where we will find her."

"That is where you will find her."

"Now, my man, are you thoroughly in earnest in your desire to help us?"

"Yes, sir."

"When do you suppose would be the best time for us to approach the island?"

"I should say after dark; and you won't make the island yourself now, before daylight, will you?"

"No."

"Then I should say, wait somewhere around till night again, and make your attack after dark."

"But that won't do at all. I want to make it at once."

"In that case, sir, I should put straight out into the Sound, and pass the island so far to the north'ard that you won't be recognized. Later in the day you can come up quietly from the east'ard."

"How will that benefit us?"

"Well, there is a bluff that shuts off her view from the east'ard, and besides, she won't be looking for you from that direction, particularly in this storm."

"That is quite true."

"And besides, sir, there's another small island just to the east'ard of Loon, which you can run this craft under so's she won't be able to see you at all. And besides, sir, from that island, which is my own, I can take you across to Loon at any time you want to go, if so be you do want to tackle Miss Scylla in daylight."

"Just a little bit ago you assured me that there were only a few men there on the island with her, and that they would not put up any sort of fight at all. Now you seem to think it extremely dangerous to make the attack in daylight. Why this change?"

"There ain't no change. What I said goes. The men won't put up any sort of fight; but you can bet your old boots that she will!"

"Don't you think that there are enough of us to handle one poor woman?" asked the detective, with a smile.

"No, sir, I don't," was the reply. "Not with the weapons that Miss Scylla fights with."

"What sort of weapons does she use; eh?"

"Dynamite."

"Eh?"

"Dynamite. That's what I said, and that is what I repeats."

"Just be good enough to explain yourself."

"Well, sir, she has got that hull place stored with dynamite. I don't know how much of it there really is, but I know that there are tons of it. The hull place is undermined with the stuff, until there ain't one of us but what has lost all his courage, jest a-walking around over it. That's what I meant when I said that the men would not put up a fight. Their fight has all oozed out of them, walking around over that there dynamite."

"Do you mean that she has got it arranged so that she can blow you up at any time she decides to do so?"

"You couldn't put what I mean any plainer than that, nohow. Let me tell you. I said that there are tons of it there, and that is true. It is buried around there, everywhere. Nobody but her knows where it is. Then, besides that, from every one of them mines there are wires leadin' all over the place, an' electric buttons in every blessed spot you can think of, so that if she happens to take the notion to blow you up—and she is likely to do that at any holy minute—all she has got to do is to reach out somewhere, behind her or in front of her or at one side or the other, and touch a button; and then—whoop! Up you go and be hanged to you! Now, maybe you think that that sort of thing is pleasant to contemplate, but I don't.

"Say, if you walk in there onto her in the daylight, and she makes the motion, it won't require more than the wink of her right eye to send the hull bilin' of you to t'other side of Jordan. That's the game you're up against when you tackle Loon Island and Miss Scylla."

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE BEAUTIFUL PIRATE.

The storm of the night disappeared with the rising of the sun.

The *Nadja*, far out in the Sound, came about off New Haven and put back toward the destination indicated by the man Thompson, and at about ten o'clock in the forenoon her anchor was dropped in four fathoms of water just off the little island which the man had said belonged to him.

Notwithstanding the warnings given by Thompson in regard to the dynamite, the detective had decided that it must be just as pleasant to be blown up in daylight as in the darkness, and had therefore determined not to delay the descent upon Loon Island and its inhabitants.

During the time that had elapsed since the conversation, the detective had busied himself in making his final preparations for the recapture of the *Plunger*, and now he felt that everything was in order, that each man knew his place and his duty, and that if nothing happened to disarrange his plans, the affair should go without a hitch.

He had made up his mind thoroughly, now, that Scylla was nothing more or less than a madwoman, whose mania took that strange form of believing that she was a descendant of the famous pirate, for in this way alone could he account for the strange character—or, rather, the many-sided characters she represented.

His plan, as he had mapped it out, was in the main as follows:

As soon as he and the men were well ashore at Thompson's home island, Nick himself was to be rowed over to the other island—Loon Island—where he was to be left alone.

An hour later, Conners and Chick, with fifteen men from the *Nadja*, and piloted by Thompson, were to cross the little strait between the two islands and land at the same point where the detective had been put ashore.

It was the plan that he was to meet them there; but in case he was not there when they arrived, they were to wait an hour and a half for his return.

If, at the expiration of that time, he had not put in an appearance, Conners was to take command of the expedition, and it was to proceed exactly as if the detective were not there at all.

Both Chick and Conners had vainly sought permission of the detective to accompany him on his hazardous venture, but he had firmly declined, insisting that if his own quest failed, it would be necessary that both of them should be with the men who were to accomplish by force what he hoped to do in person by strategy.

His own plan was simply to obtain access to the home of Scylla, to capture her personally and thus, to make use of a metaphor, to draw her fangs, after which the rest would be easy.

The *Plunger* itself was of course left until the last thing.

There was no doubt whatever in Thompson's mind that she was by this time safely inclosed inside the boathouse he had described, and Nick believed her to be perfectly safe there as long as he could prevent Madam Scylla from doing anything to destroy her.

It was Chick who rowed him across the narrow strait, and left him there, and the assistant waited in the small boat until he saw his chief disappear among the bushes which lined the bank.

As Nick advanced, he thought that a better place for his attack upon the island could not have been devised, and presently after having climbed a considerable height, he came out upon a shelving rock among low bushes, from which he could look down upon all that the man Thompson had described to him.

There was the great house; there the many outbuildings, rambling away among shrubbery and bushes, unkempt and uncared for, which yet presented a wild beauty to the eye and defied the art of man to improve upon.

"Scylla selected her island well," was his thought. "It could not have been better for the purpose, and yet, according to the story told by Thompson, her home must have been here always. Doubtless it was the island and its suggestions and its utter loneliness that turned her mind in the first place and which led her on to these extravagances."

But he did not stop long to speculate upon the character of Scylla. He was there to recapture the *Plunger* and incidentally to take in Scylla also, and there was no time to lose.

From the plateau where he stood, concealed by the bushes which surrounded him, he could see, as Thompson had told him, that a pathway, quite worn, led directly to the rear of one of the outbuildings, which would have been the stable had there been use for such a thing on the island.

Bushes grew at either side of the path, and by stooping low the detective figured that he could reach the stable unseen.

He had adopted no disguise, since if his presence were discovered, there was no disguise in the world that would avail him at all.

He must remain entirely unseen, or his share of the adventure would be past in a moment, and the parts to be enacted by the others rendered thrice difficult.

But he did not hesitate for all that.

Stooping low he hurried forward, and after a little he straightened himself into an upright posture behind the stable, satisfied that he had at least succeeded in that much of his desperate undertaking.

To make his way inside the stable and to pass through it to the opposite side, was the work of only a mo-

ment, and there he discovered that it would be an easy matter for him to keep under cover until he reached the house itself.

But as he was about to step forward rather boldly, he was halted suddenly by the appearance of three men approaching the exact point where he was standing, and he quickly darted back again under cover and waited.

They came on together until they were directly in the doorway through which the detective had intended to pass, and there they halted.

One of them seated himself on the sill of the door, while the others remained just outside, and the trio calmly proceeded to whittle sticks while they talked.

The detective would not have minded this so much had they referred to any subject that interested him, but during the ten or fifteen minutes consumed in their gossip, the name of the *Plunger* or of Scylla was not once mentioned.

At last, however, they took their departure, and Nick was free to move on again.

This he did at once, and soon he covered the distance between the stable and the house.

Here he found a cellar door conveniently open, and he hurried down the stone steps and passed into the darkness beyond.

Cellars are mostly alike, after all is said, and Nick soon found that this one was no exception to the general rule, so he had no difficulty in finding his way to the stairs that led to the floor above him.

Again luck favored him.

The door at the top of the stairs was not only unfastened, but it was open a crack, and after listening a moment to satisfy himself that there was no person immediately on the opposite side of it, he stepped through and found himself in a half-darkened hallway, evidently at the rear of the house.

A quick glance around him was sufficient to convince him of the general plan of the interior of the house, and after a moment he again made his way forward, this time toward that section of the house where Scylla would most likely be found.

Presently he passed into a second entry, and from there into the dining room of the residence, and here he was amazed to discover every evidence of old-time aristocracy and elegance.

The furniture was of solid mahogany and very old, although in perfect condition; the carpeting on the floor was thick and heavy, and the paintings on the walls had been selected with taste and with no consideration of expense. His practiced eyes told him all this at once.

From the dining room he passed into the library which was connected with it, but this, like the other rooms he had seen, bore no traces of recent occupancy.

From the library into the main hall of the building; thence into the parlors; then to the great living room, and here he saw signs that some persons had recently been there.

The morning had been chilly and there were the remains of a fire in the grate. A bit of embroidery work in a hoop of wood occupied one chair. A book, turned face down, rested upon a side table near another chair, and there was a pair of spectacles across the binding, as if the person who had been reading had arrived at that time of life when glasses became necessary.

He listened, but there was no sound.

"Plainly," he murmured to himself, "I must search further. I wonder where they can all be keeping themselves? Doubtless down at the boathouse inspecting the *Plunger.*"

He passed into the hall again and up the wide stairs toward the landing of the second floor, which he reached without having heard a sound.

"This might well be called a house of mystery," he thought. "Were it not for the three men I saw outside I should say that there was not a live person on the premises."

At the top of the stairs he paused long enough to select the room he thought best to enter first, and then he boldly stepped forward.

Peering cautiously into the room, for the door was half ajar, he uttered—or, rather, he made the motion with his lips of uttering—an exclamation of pleasure, for there, carelessly thrown across a chair in plain view from the point where he stood, was a masculine costume which he instantly recognized as being the garments that were worn by the supposed "Mr." Raymond Orford during the interview in the cabin of the *Siren,* now at the bottom of the Sound.

"That is the first real evidence that I have discovered," he thought.

Then, having satisfied himself that there was no person in the room, he passed through the door.

For a moment he stood in the center of the room taking in every detail of it, for the details that he did see meant much to him. In a word they satisfied him that he was in the private apartment of the mistress of the house, and that she could not be far distant.

Then he stepped to the window, and pulling the curtain partly aside, looked out.

"Hello!" he muttered.

There was a wide, cemented pathway which led directly away from the front entrance—and he found that he was directly above that part of the house—toward the water, and he could see at the end of it the roof of what he supposed must be the boathouse.

But that was not what had called forth the exclamation.

In the pathway, approaching the house at a leisurely walk, were three women.

An old lady—a very old lady, apparently—was between the other two.

On one side of her walked a woman who was middle-aged, and on the other side walked one who was at once young and beautiful.

Nick Carter stared at them in such amazement that for the moment he entirely forgot where he was or what he was doing; and his amazement was caused by the remarkable resemblance between the three women, in spite of the disparity of their ages.

The youngest of the three was Scylla; he recognized her now at a glance.

"As beautiful as a dream," he mused. "So young, so beautiful, so charming and so bad. It is difficult to understand. And those other women—why, they must be the mother and the grandmother of Scylla. There can be no doubt about that. There is no make-up anywhere there. Not a bit of it. But what does it all mean? Who are they? What are they? Are they all in this conspiracy of crime together? Is that beautiful old woman as bad as I know Scylla to be? Is that placid-looking, saintly, middle-aged woman as bad as I know Scylla to be? Here is a puzzle such as I never expected to find. And yet I know that they can have been nowhere else than to the boathouse to inspect the *Plunger*, and therefore one must be as bad as the others are."

He became so absorbed in this strange encounter, that he watched the three women arrive at the steps of the veranda and ascend them, out of his sight, without thinking to turn and conceal himself; and he still kept thinking about it after they had long disappeared from view.

But he was presently brought to himself with startling suddeness, for he heard a sharp voice behind him, and turning quickly, he found himself face to face with the beautiful Scylla, the Siren; the beautiful pirate of Oyster Bay.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE STORY OF MADNESS.

"Well, sir?"

It was rather a quiet voice, and yet there was undoubted emphasis in it, which startled the detective, and he turned quickly to discover that Scylla must have run lightly and rapidly up the stairs while he was lost in thought, and had entered the room while he was still gazing abstractedly out through the window.

There was not the least surprise evinced in her face; in fact, Nick was impressed for the first instant that it expressed nothing whatever, but as the interval passed, he saw a look of hatred come into it; and then she stepped back and placed one hand against the wall where an electric button showed plainly through the paper.

He noticed, too, that her fingers reached out tentatively toward the button until one of them almost touched it.

So, for a moment, they remained, gazing into each other's eyes.

Both were silent and both were motionless; and then it was Scylla who spoke first.

"You are Nick Carter," she said, quietly, and with conviction.

"Yes."

"When did you get here? How long have you been here?"

"A matter of half an hour," he replied, and he started forward as if to move toward her.

But he halted instantly, for she cried out to him:

"Stay where you are, sir. Do not move an inch without my permission unless you wish to send yourself and many others to eternity at once."

"Isn't that rather strong language for a lady to use?" asked Nick, smiling a little, although he afterward confessed that he never in his life felt so uneasy as he did at that moment.

"Strong or not, it is the truth," she replied.

"Will you tell me why it is the truth?" he asked, smiling again.

"Because my finger almost touches a button which, if I should press it, would send this house with every person it contains, hundreds of feet into the air."

"Really!" said Nick, pretending that he did not believe her, although as a matter of fact he was quite convinced that she spoke the truth.

"How did you get here?" she demanded, taking no notice whatever of his incredulity.

"I walked from the shore, beyond the stables. I came to that shore in a small boat. Is that sufficiently explicit?"

"How many are with you?"

"At the present moment I am alone, save for yourself."

"How many came to this island with you?" she persisted, but with great calmness.

"One; and he returned from whence he came the moment he had placed me ashore."

"Is that the truth, Nick Carter?"

"That is the literal truth. I swear it."

"What was your object in coming here?"

"Need you ask that? I came to recapture a certain vessel which you borrowed rather surreptitiously from the government of the United States."

"Bah! And did you suppose that you could accomplish that alone?"

"I have accomplished a great many things alone, where help would have been in the way."

Instead of replying to him, Scylla raised her voice suddenly, and shouted.

"Mother!" she called. "Mother! Come here!"

Then turning her wondrous eyes again upon the detective, she said, calmly:

"Is it necessary that I should repeat the warning I have already given you?"

"No; since you ask me, I do not really think it is, Miss Scylla," replied the detective.

There was a rustling of women's garments from the hallway, and the next instant the woman whom Nick had selected as being the mother of Scylla, made her appearance in the doorway.

Like her daughter she evinced no surprise when her eyes encountered the detective. Like Scylla, also, Nick thought, there was at first no understanding expression whatever upon her features; and strangely enough again, like her, there instantly came an expression of hate—only this time Nick thought it was mingled with horror—into her eyes.

She said no word to Nick, but she turned toward her daughter, and in a voice which, though calm, was plaintive, she asked:

"Has it come, Scylla? Has the time come?"

"Not yet, mother," was the reply. "Wait. We will see whether it has come or not. Sit down, mother, dear."

Nick Carter marveled at the affection he heard in that tone of tenderness, and also at the instant obedience which the mother gave to it, for she dropped upon a chair which was near to her, and again her face assumed that expression of utter placidity which Nick found it so difficult to define.

"You may as well be seated also, Mr. Carter," said Scylla, then. "There is a chair beside you. Will you take it? You will be more comfortable and this interview promises to be a protracted one."

Nick turned his head, saw the chair, and seated himself upon it.

As he did so, Scylla stepped forward with a quick motion and seized a twisted green cord which hung suspended from the lamp chandelier above the table in the center of the room.

"Don't dare to move!" she said to him, when he looked at her inquiringly. "This cord relieves me also from standing. You see, I can carry it around the room with me; and I call your attention to the fact that there is an electric button attached to the end of it. I have only to press upon it to explode more than a ton of dynamite that is beneath our feet. Do you understand that? And do you comprehend what it means?"

"I understand it all right, but I am not at all sure that I comprehend what you mean," he replied.

"That is what I propose to tell you; but first let me again assure you that if you make the slightest effort to attack either of us, or to escape yourself from this room, I will press upon this button in my grasp. If I should do that, we would all be killed so instantly that not one of us would realize that death had come."

"It is not a pleasant thought to contemplate," said Nick.

"Not unless you have accustomed yourself to it, as we have."

"I have heard that one may accustom one's self to anything."

"It is not that," she replied, as if she were arguing; "it is that we are prepared for just such an extremity as this one is. That we have long expected it to come. That when it does come we are prepared to meet it without a murmur."

"You would kill your mother, your grandmother, yourself and all the others who would be affected by the explosion, without compunction; is that what you mean?" asked Nick.

"Yes," she replied, calmly, "that is what I mean."

"But why?"

"To escape a worse fate."

"For yourself, perhaps; but for your mother, and——"

"For all of us."

"I do not understand you."

"Do not you know—have you not guessed that we are all mad?"

"Mad!" said Nick, so astonished by the admission that he did not know what else to say.

"Yes; mad."

"But surely——"

"Hush, Nick Carter! Do not argue with what is beyond your understanding."

"Certainly not; but——"

"Hush, I say!"

"Well, Miss Scylla?"

For a moment after the detective asked this tentative question, Scylla remained silent.

She leaned back in her chair and there was a smile of strange meaning upon her lips, although in her eyes there seemed to be no smile at all.

But never once did she relinquish her hold upon the knob which contained the button, and not once did she take her eyes from his face; and all the time the thumb of her right hand seemed to play with the electric key as if she were meditating in her mind if it would not be easier, after all, to touch off the mine and have done with it all.

But after a little she spoke again, and her voice was as quiet, as subdued and as self-contained as ever. So much so in fact that Nick marveled again at this form of madness, and caught himself wondering if it could be real.

"It is perhaps as well," she said, slowly, "that I should tell you the whole truth, since there seems to be no other way than to bring this conversation to an end in the manner I have so long contemplated. I mean, of course, by pressing this button when we have done, and blowing this house with all that it contains into the air."

"There may be another way than that," suggested Nick.

She shook her head sadly, Nick thought; and then she continued:

"Yes; we are all mad. My grandmother is mad. My mother is mad. My sister is mad; but of her we have known nothing of late. She has disappeared since that time, now quite long ago, when she rescued you from drowning.* Do you remember it?"

"Perfectly," replied the detective.

"We are all mad; quite mad," she continued. "We believe ourselves to be the descendants of a great sea rover and pirate—Capt. Kidd by name. You may have heard of him?"

"Yes," said Nick; "I think I have heard the name before."

"Sixty years ago, when my grandmother was the same age as I am now, her husband—my grandfather—was a pirate. A real pirate, such as you read about in books, who captured vessels on the high seas, who drove their crews and passengers overboard and carried the women into captivity. It is said that my great-grandmother was carried into captivity in that way, and I suppose it must be true.

"Indeed," she continued, after an almost imperceptible pause, "I have no doubt that the madness in the family began at that time, for it must have driven her mad to be carried away like that; don't you think so?"

"I quite agree with you," said Nick. He was determined to agree with her in anything and everything she chose to say, his chief object being to gain time and so to allow for the arrival of Conners and Chick with the others on the scene; and yet, even while he hoped for their coming, he argued with himself that it would be better if he should induce Scylla to set off the mine before their arrival, since it seemed almost impossible that this strange young woman could be prevented from carrying out her evident intention.

"So, you see," she continued, "I represent the fourth generation of madness in this family which has always made its headquarters on this island, and to which place my ancestors have retired to rest, or to end their lives, since—well, since before the time of the capture of my grandmother's mother.

"We are very happy here when the madness is not upon us; when we can sit on the shore and watch the sunlight or the moonlight on the water. But those times are only intervals. It is perhaps fortunate for you that you have come here during one of those intervals of lucidity, else you would have found us all very different.

"You would have seen my grandmother, perhaps, running up and down that pathway between the boathouse and this building, shrieking, tearing her hair, and crying out that there was blood everywhere; blood on her garments, in the air, everywhere. You might have seen my mother doing the same thing, and have found me sitting idly by, amused at it all.

"This seems incredible, does it not? I know that it does, so you need not reply. It is, however, the truth.

"You came to us at a lucid interval—an interval which always follows upon one of our expeditions; for when we are successful in an undertaking like that of the capture of the *Plunger*, peace reigns here for quite a time, and there is naught to do but await the return of that craving for piracy.

"And those women I had with me at the time you surprised us in the old tunnel,* surely you have discovered that they were all mad; that they were creatures whom I had rescued from madhouses and so brought them under my control. Surely that has been discovered by this time."

"I have been absent from the city," began the detective, but she stopped him.

"Whether you have discovered it or not, it is true," she said, placidly. "Remember that I am sane now, while I talk to you, but that after a little the madness will return."

"Were you sane while you were enacting the part of Raymond Orford, the owner of the *Siren?*" asked Nick.

"Sane? No; that was the cunning of madness."

She leaned toward him, and her eyes shone with a new and strange excitement as she continued:

"There is nothing else in the world like it, Mr. Carter—that cunning of madness. You cannot conceive of the unholy joy one feels when one succeeds in outwitting a person who is not mad. It is as if you were pitted against the combined intellects of the world, and for a moment found yourself master of them all. Do you not think that would be joy?

"We like to sit here and plan out great things—and then, when the time comes, execute them. Ah! it is grand! grand!

"Do you know what the taking of the submarine means to us? Have you any idea what has been planned, of which that vessel was to be a part? I will tell you.

"You have seen, have you not, the great ocean greyhounds, so fleet that nothing can catch them; so big that nothing could daunt them; so well armed that they could defy any ordinary pirate? Well, in my grandmother's day there was nothing which the ships of their fleet could not overtake and capture, but of late it has been different, and she and my mother, and I, of course, have planned and planned how we should one day send one of those big ocean greyhounds to the bottom; but we could never get near to a way of doing it until we knew all about the *Plunger*.

*See No. 465, "Scylla, the Sea Robber."

*See No. 465, "Scylla, the Sea Robber."

"Then we thought we saw our way, and so we planned to get possession of a submarine—or build one."

"To have built one," interjected the detective, "would have cost a great deal of money."

"Money!" she cried out; and then she laughed. "We have gold, gold, gold! All the treasures of our pirate ancestors are buried on this island. There is a way to that treasure, too—a way which we know well, and whenever we are in need of funds we help ourselves. A stranger could never hope to find it; but it is here. Millions of it.

"And so, with the *Plunger*, we were to attack an ocean greyhound and send her to the bottom with all on board. After that we would have returned here and rested, and after a little we would have attacked another and another, and so on to the end. It would have been great fun, would it not? And my grandmother and mother would have clapped their hands in glee."

"Tell me," said Nick, believing that this was a good moment to ask the question, "how you discovered that the crew of the submarine was to be called away from their vessel at the time you captured her."

Scylla half closed her eyes and smiled at him.

"There are some things which I will not tell you," she replied, "and that is one of them. But I will say this. The distance to Washington is not far, and a beautiful woman can accomplish anything at the national capital.

"But enough of this. The time has come to act. Are you ready to die, Mr. Carter? Have you made your peace with the world, and shall I press the button now? Are you quite ready?"

CHAPTER X.

THE STRANGEST PROPOSAL IN THE WORLD.

During all this time and throughout the conversation, the elder woman had remained passively in her chair, and had seemed strangely oblivious to all that was going on around her.

At times she smiled, but whether at something that was said by her daughter, or because of a thought that had flashed through her diseased mind, the detective could not have told.

And now, as Scylla ceased speaking, with that crucial question on her lips, there came the sound of a strange thumping through the hallway toward them, and then there appeared in the doorway the old woman who has been referred to as the grandmother.

She paused there, and peered in at them, first at one and then at another until she had studied the three tentatively, and then, in a thin and querulous voice, she demanded:

"Where is he? Where is he?"

"He is out at sea," replied Scylla, quietly, as if she was perfectly aware for whom the old woman inquired.

"I thought he had returned, and that he had taken new prizes," said the old woman, petulantly.

"No; he has not returned," said Scylla.

"Then who is this? Who is this man here? I do not know him. He is not one of the officers of my husband's crew."

"No; he is a stranger," said Scylla, calmly.

"A stranger! What right has he here? There is only one fate for all strangers who dare to approach this island."

"Yes, grandmother; yes. He knows that."

"Has he been condemned?"

"Yes, grandmother; and we were about to execute him when you interrupted us."

"Ah! Then I have arrived in time."

The old woman peered at Nick sharply, and then stumped with her cane across the room toward him until she paused directly in front of him, and in such a position that he could no longer keep his eyes upon Scylla.

It was then that cold shivers began to chase each other down the detective's spine, for now Scylla might decide at any instant to press upon that fatal button.

But he knew that there was no help for it if she should choose to do so, and he fully realized that he would only hasten the awful moment if he attempted to do anything to prevent it; so he resigned himself to the inevitable with what composure he could, and looked up into the smooth, calm and apparently harmless face of the old woman who stood almost over him where he was seated near the window.

"Who are you?" she demanded of him.

Nick did not know what to reply, but the voice of Scylla came to him from across the room.

"Answer her, Mr. Carter," she said. "Talk to her if she wishes it. She cannot hear you, but she knows by the motion of your lips what you say. Tell her the truth."

"Who are you?" repeated the old woman.

"I am a detective," replied Nick.

"A detective? What is that? Is it a name for a new officer on one of these newfangled ships that ride the seas nowadays?"

"Yes," replied Nick, humoring her.

"Are you to walk the plank?"

"I suppose so. Miss Scylla has not told me yet just what I am expected to do."

"You are a handsome young man," murmured the old woman, regarding him earnestly.

"Thank you," said the detective, smiling in spite of himself.

"Almost it seems a pity that you should die so young."

"That is just what I was thinking, madam."

"Why don't you join my husband's crew, marry Scylla and be one of us, young man?"

"Why, indeed?" replied Nick.

With a suddenness that was almost startling, the old woman wheeled and faced her granddaughter.

"He seems willing enough," she said to her.

As if the subject were one which somehow possessed a deep interest for them all, there was a moment of strained silence following upon the announcement, and then the old woman repeated her remark.

"He seems willing enough," she said again, and her daughter repeated the remark after her like an echo; Scylla, however, remained mute.

"Did you hear, Scylla? He seems willing enough," exclaimed the old woman again; and she stepped aside and stood so that she could peer with her strangely sharp eyes from one to the other.

Nick was amazed to discover that Scylla was blushing furiously, and he was totally at a loss to understand it until the old woman went on with her queer talk, and presently it dawned upon him what was meant.

"You have said that there was only one man in the world whom you would consent to marry, and that he was a detective, but that he would never marry you," said the old woman. "Now he is here, and he is willing. Why should he be made to walk the plank when he will join us? We need men in the crew. Particularly we need officers. The family will die out if you do not marry, and we have lived on this island since—ah, well, it is so long ago that time itself has forgotten when it was."

She turned again to Nick.

"Will you join us and marry Scylla?" she demanded, putting the question plainly enough this time; and Nick, thinking it best to temporize, answered as he had done before:

"Why not?"

Again the old woman turned toward her granddaughter.

"Will you marry him, Scylla?" she asked in the same high voice, and, to Nick's infinite astonishment, Scylla replied:

"Why not?"

He looked toward Scylla now, in search of an explanation, and he saw that her eyes were fixed strangely upon him, and that for the moment she seemed to have forgotten that she held the deadly knob in her hand.

He noticed, too, that her fingers were moving nervously, and he understood that at any instant she might turn on the electric current without intending to do so.

There was no longer any doubt in his mind of the utter madness of these people, and it occurred to him that by pretending a willingness to make Scylla his wife, he might draw her attention away from the dynamite mine and the electric button long enough to save himself and all of them from utter destruction.

Whatever these women had done, he knew that an asylum for the insane was the only prison to which they would ever be sent, and while it would be perhaps as well if they were all dead before they entered one, he had no wish to accompany them on that long journey to the unknown.

While these thoughts were passing rapidly through his brain, he was returning the gaze which Scylla had fastened upon him.

There was a strange, pathetic expression in her eyes. There seemed for the moment to be no madness there. Indeed, if it had not been for his previous experience and he had been suddenly called upon to construe that look of hers, he would have said that she was considering the suggestion made to her only in the light of an opportunity to save him from peril; that for a moment she had put herself entirely outside the pale.

And then he thought she made an indefinite signal to him, with her eyes, as if to ask him to appear to coincide in whatever she should say.

The flush had not left her face. He could see that she was breathing heavily. He knew that she was disturbed; and then her voice spoke again.

"Shall we discuss the matter?" she asked him, calmly.

"Why not?" he replied again.

"Shall we discuss the matter?" she repeated.

"Yes," he said.

And Scylla, still with her eyes fixed upon him, spoke to her mother.

"Leave the room, mother dear," she said, "and take grandmother with you. I will call when it is time for you to return."

The mother rose obediently from her chair, crossed the room, took her own mother by the arm, and together the two withdrew slowly from the room, closing the door after them.

The moment they were gone—the instant the door was closed—Scylla sighed profoundly.

"Did you understand, Mr. Carter?" she asked of him then.

"I am not at all sure that I did," he replied.

"Do you believe that I am mad? Utterly mad?"

"You have said that you are."

"That is begging the question. Do you believe it?"

"There are moments when I have believed it, since I have been in this room; but on the whole I find that belief rather difficult. You do not altogether conduct yourself like a mad person."

She smiled sadly into his eyes.

"Madness is my refuge; sanity is my curse," she said, enigmatically. "You do not understand that, do you?"

"I confess that I do not."

"Listen to me, Mr. Carter, while I make to you the strangest proposal that was ever made to a human being."

"Well, Scylla?"

"You must understand me as your own good sense will direct, for I will not explain to you any further than the words I shall utter imply. If you can read between the lines, do so, and perhaps after it is all over, you will find some pity in your soul for Scylla, the Siren."

"Perhaps I have already found that," said Nick.

"Hush! Listen to me."

"Well?"

"I had determined since I found you in this room to end all the horror of my life this day. I had thought that since you were here, you should die with us; but now, it all seems to me like a wanton and unnecessary waste of life and like needless murder by my hand."

"I am glad that you have begun to view it in that light."

"Hush, I tell you! Not counting any of the persons you have seen since you came here, there are fifteen crazy men on this island. There was one other, but he was becoming sane and I tied his hands and feet and left him in the hold of the *Siren* to perish. He was dangerous to our plans. So there are fifteen crazy men, aside from yourself, on this island at the present moment. They are men who from time to time I have rescued from institutions for the insane, and they are my slaves.

"There is no reason why you and those fifteen men should die, along with my mother and grandmother and myself—is there?"

"One would naturally answer that there is not."

"Then I will make this strange proposition to you."

"Well?"

"I have toiled all my life to make my mother and grandmother happy. You have brought here with you to-day the possibility of sending them to their death, the happiest they have ever been. It is their wish—it has always been their wish that I should marry. There is nothing that could happen in this world that would bring them such instant and complete happiness as to witness my marriage. You cannot understand this, but I do."

"Now, among those crazy men to whom I have referred there is a priest. Do you begin to understand me?"

"No, Scylla, I do not."

"My proposal is this: If you will consent to go through the form of marriage with me, at which that mad priest will officiate, the instant the ceremony is done you may take those fifteen men in the *Plunger* with you and leave this island; and then, as soon as you are far enough off the shore for safety, I will blow up the island with everybody left here upon it, and thus you and they will be saved, and your duty will be done. What say you to that, Nick Carter?"

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE POWER OF A MADWOMAN.

"But, Scylla——" began Nick, expostulating; but she raised the bulb containing the electric button and held it menacingly before his eyes.

"It is the only way," she said. "Shall I press the button, or will you consent?"

"Scylla——"

"Answer me. Is it yes or no?"

"There is something I must say to you before I reply," he exclaimed, desperately, wondering if she would consent to wait till he did so.

"What is it?" she demanded, still holding the button ready to press.

"When you found me in this room, you asked me if I came here alone, and I truthfully replied to you that another person brought me to the island, but went away at once."

"Yes. Well?"

"That was the truth, but it was not all the truth."

"Not all the truth? What do you mean?"

"I mean that there were others who were to follow me here if I did not return in a certain fixed time. That time has almost elapsed."

"So. Well, let them come. What of it?"

"You would destroy them also."

"Not if you consent to my proposition. And I hope that the time has not elapsed entirely, for if one of them should enter this house and surprise my mother and grandmother, either of them would set off the mine. You would then have no choice."

"It was to ask you what was to be done that I have told you this."

"There is only one thing to be done."

"What is that?"

"Tell me where the men are to land. I will send a messenger to them who shall carry a message from you telling them to return whence they came and to wait till you join them. All this I will do if you consent to my proposal."

"You are surely aware that it would be no marriage—a ceremony performed by a madman, are you not?"

"Assuredly."

"What, then, is your object?"

"I have told you; it is that my mother and my grandmother shall die happy."

"And is there no other way?"

"There is no other way, Nick Carter."

"What if my followers should refuse to obey me?"

"It would not alter the present attitude of affairs in the least. They would only die with us, that is all, for I tell you plainly that if I should set off this mine, it in turn would explode a dozen others, and the whole island will be destroyed. If there were a thousand men upon it, they would all be killed as surely as you are seated there. But, come. I take it from what you have said that there is no time to lose. Do you consent?"

"Yes," replied Nick, desperately, for it was the only way, and he felt that yet there might develop a means of saving them all.

The flush of supreme joy which suffused Scylla's face when he made the reply almost frightened the detective, and for an instant he feared that she would set off the mine, so palpably did she tremble; but in a moment she controlled herself, and then, pointing toward a desk with her disengaged hand, she said:

"Yonder are writing materials. Write your message. I will send it. You shall read your note to me after you have written it, and it must be imperative. I will sit here and watch you, and if you transgress our agreement in any way, I will set off the mine."

"I am beginning to understand that," said the detective, as he rose and crossed the room to the desk in question.

There, he wrote rapidly, as follows:

"CONNERS AND CHICK: You must return at once to the *Nadja*. You must put out into the Sound a distance of six or seven miles and wait there till I come to you. I will come on the submarine. This is important and imperative. Let there be no hesitation on the part of any of you. The absolute safety of the *Plunger* depends upon it."

He signed it with his own name and affixed a private mark which he knew that Chick would recognize as rendering it entirely authentic; and then he turned and read the note to the strangely mad woman.

"You have said nothing about the danger to their lives, or to your own," she commented.

"That would cut no ice with them at all," he replied. "They might consider it less authentic if I did that. And now, how are you going to send it to them?"

"You have not yet told me where they will land on the island," she said.

Nick described the place to her.

"Have you noticed that here and there among all the electric buttons affixed to the walls of this room there is now and then a red one?" she asked, then.

"Yes," he replied.

"Then touch one of the red ones for me. It will bring a messenger to us."

"Are you sure that it will not set off one of the mines, Scylla?"

"Quite sure," she smiled back; and he pressed one of the red buttons.

There followed an interval of two or three moments during which neither of them spoke, and then there was a tap against the door, and one of the men whom Nick had seen at the stable entered the room.

If he saw the detective at all, he did not signify it in any way, and while Scylla gave him directions about the delivery of the note he stood listening to her in silence. At the end, he accepted it in silence and strode away.

"He will report back here when the men have gone," Scylla said then. "Until that time, we must wait as we are."

The detective realized then that he had burned all his bridges behind him and that now the ultimate outcome of the adventure rested with himself alone.

But the thought of it spurred him to new determination to avoid every condition the woman had made, if possible, and not only to save the *Plunger*, but to save everybody connected with this strange adventure as well.

Within a time that was surprisingly short of itself, but which seemed to be interminably long to the detective, the messenger returned.

As before, he paid no heed to the presence of Nick, but gave a scrap of paper into Scylla's hand, from which she read aloud:

"DEAR NICK: It shall be as you say. CHICK."

"Is that sufficient?" she asked.

"It seems to be quite so," replied the detective.

"They have gone."

"Yes."

"And now are you prepared to carry out our compact?"

"Yes."

She turned to the messenger, who had remained in the room in obedience to a signal from her.

"Send Father John to me," she ordered; and he left the room.

Ten minutes later a man in the dress of a priest tiptoed into the room, without having done them the courtesy of knocking for admittance.

"Father John," said Scylla, "do you see this man?"

"I do, daughter," was the deep-voiced reply.

"He is to be my husband."

The mad priest bowed.

"You are to wed us."

The mad priest bowed again.

"The ceremony will take place in this room, in the presence of my mother, my grandmother, and two of the men whom you will bring here with you at once. Let there be no delay."

"There shall be none, daughter," was the slow reply; and then he turned toward Nick and added:

"Is this your wish, sir?"

Nick nodded, but the priest repeated:

"Is this your wish, sir?"

"Yes," said the detective; and he felt that he could have bitten his tongue out for the statement, although it was his wish that this mock marriage should appear to take place, so that in the excitement of it he could somehow, before it should be consummated, change everything.

When the mad priest had gone, Scylla rose from her chair.

"Nick Carter," she said, slowly, "the mad priest is not a priest at all. He only believes himself to be one. It is his form of madness. We all have different forms of madness. That which actuates my grandmother and my mother is piracy on the high seas; that which actuates the man who has just left us is the firm belief that he possesses the power to bless all men, for he thinks he is the reincarnation of St. John. That which actuates me is to render my mother and my grandmother happy at whatever cost, even if it be the shedding of blood, and the form of madness with which you are afflicted——"

"I?" exclaimed Nick, interrupting her in spite of himself.

"Yes; you are not less mad than the rest of us."

"Possibly not; but what were you about to describe as the form which my affliction takes, Scylla?"

"Why, you believe yourself to be the greatest detective on earth. You believe yourself to be the one man who cannot be overcome. You believe yourself to be invulnerable. You are, in your own mind, the ego of all things. Nick Carter, the Great; Nick Carter, the Immaculate. Nick Carter, the Strong. Nick Carter, the Perfect, the Unapproachable, the Omnipotent. Bah! You poor fool, don't you know that I have been playing with you?"

"Is this another form of the madness of which you have had so much to say, Scylla?" asked Nick, when the boisterous laugh which followed her announcement had ceased.

"Madness! Who said I was mad? Did you? Did I?"

Again she laughed long and loud; and then she began to stride up and down the floor, swinging the hand that

held the bulb frantically, but all the while keeping her eyes, which were now blazing with the fire of real madness, fixed determinedly upon the detective.

If there had been moments before this when he had doubted that Scylla was really mad, all doubt upon the subject left him now.

He had seen enough of mad people to know that a paroxysm was rapidly coming on, and that if he did not discover some means of holding it in check, she would presently be raving, and get utterly beyond her own control.

"I have been in tight places before now," was the thought that came to him, "but this one, for originality and reality, takes the cake."

He watched her in silence, for he realized that it was a moment in his experience when silence was truly golden; and after a little he saw that she was becoming more quiet; that although she never for one instant ceased to watch him narrowly, her mind—that poor, diseased mind of hers—seemed to be wandering from its original purpose.

Once she nearly dropped the bulb which contained the electric button, and Nick's hopes rose, but she instantly seized it again, and glared at him as if he were the direct cause of the mishap.

Once she halted in her tramping up and down the room and laughed aloud in his face; then she said, plaintively:

"It is true, is it not, that but for this inherited madness, I might have been some good man's wife? Even you might have wedded me, all other things being equal. Is it not so?"

"It is quite true," replied Nick, earnestly.

"And you pity me? Say that you do! Say that you do!"

"I pity you, Scylla, with all my heart and soul," he replied, earnestly.

With a quick motion of her hand she threw the bulb from her, and so that it flew almost directly into his grasp; and as he caught it dexterously, she fell upon her knees in front of him and cried out, despairingly:

"Set off the mine, then, and let us die together!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE EXPLOSION.

At that very instant the door opened, and the man who supposed himself to be a priest entered the room.

But he paused just inside the door, perceiving the scene that was being enacted, and rubbed his hands together as if he were washing them.

"Daughter," he said, and Scylla half turned.

"What is it, Father John?" she asked, quietly. Her paroxysm seemed entirely to have passed and to have left her limp and lifeless almost.

"I could not find the others," he said. "It seems as if I am the only one left of them all. Where are they, daughter? Where are they hidden?"

"Never mind them. Go away," she said. "It is well. It has all passed now. I am no longer your queen, but this man here is your king. Bow to him, Father John."

"And the wedding?" he asked. "The marriage?"

"It has taken place, Father John. You are too late. The ceremony is over. It is all done. Did I not say that this man was your king? Could he be your king unless he were also my husband and I his wife?"

"No, daughter."

"Then go away, Father John."

He turned as if to obey, but he paused in the doorway, waited a moment, and then looked back into the room.

"There are two men coming up the stairs," he said. "Perhaps they are the ones."

And then, before Scylla could reply, the priest was shoved aside, and Conners and Chick appeared in the doorway.

They would have leaped forward, but the scene before them restrained them, and they paused hesitatingly as Nick held up a warning hand.

But Scylla had seen them, and she leaped to her feet and confronted them; and then, before a motion could be made to prevent the act, she leaped past them into the hallway and flung the door shut behind her.

As Nick leaped forward to detain her, he heard a key grate in the lock, and one glance at the door told him that it would take a great deal of time to break it from its fastenings; and he knew that time was something which none of them possessed at that moment.

"Quick!" he called to the others; and at the same instant he leaped toward the window and flung a chair through it, carrying away sash and all.

"Out with you!' he cried, and he almost flung Chick through the opening, while with the other hand he hurled Conners toward it.

"Jump out for your lives, and run!"

And then, as they obeyed him, he seized the demented man who thought himself a priest, and, carrying him to the window, dropped him outside, instantly springing out after him.

Once upon the ground—and it was not a long leap, for there was soft turf to alight upon—the natural direction to take was down the path toward the boathouse, and, perceiving that Chick and Conners were already headed that way, Nick seized the priest in his arms and bounded after them.

Then, from behind them, he heard a burst of pealing laughter, and the voice of Scylla cried out:

"Now for the fireworks! Now! Now!"

* * * * * * *

When Nick Carter opened his eyes to consciousness and sat up, the recollection of all that had occurred returned to him slowly, and the most distinct of all these was the terrible rumble and roar that had immediately preceded his loss of consciousness; and then he recalled it all, bit by bit.

He saw Chick and Conners coming toward him as if they walked with difficulty; and he saw the body of the man he had carried lying a few feet away with a huge stone across his chest. He was the only one of the four who was injured, and how the rock had managed to strike him down without slaying the man who was trying to rescue him has forever been a mystery.

All around them, on every hand, were heaps of stones and débris, and how they escaped death or serious injury was inexplicable, but beyond the terrific shock, which had stunned them as it threw them to the earth, there was not a casualty to report, save that of the poor fellow who had called himself Father John.

Behind them, where the house had once stood, there was a heap of ruins, over which hung a wavering cloud of dust; and beyond, where the stables were, was another wreck, although it was not so complete; but the roofs of the outbuildings had fallen in, and the walls had buckled inward.

Nick turned toward the boathouse, and saw, gladly, that it was uninjured.

"Come!" he said to his companions. "There were fifteen men somewhere upon this place, and all of them poor, demented wrecks of men; but we must search for them at once."

"My dear Nick," said Conners, rubbing his shoulder ruefully, "the whole push of them are safely on board the *Nadja* at this moment."

"Thank Heaven for that! Then help me search the ruins of the house, for Scylla and two women are there, and they are assuredly killed. Nevertheless, there may be life in one——"

"The two old women are aboard the *Nadja* also," said Conners. "Only one person has perished in this impromptu cataclysm, and that is Scylla, the mad woman."

"Only Scylla?" said Nick; and then he added to himself:

"They were all mad women. It was a place of mad people."

He was silent a moment, and then he said:

"Come, boys, we must find the body of Scylla."

And it was found, after a long search, beneath a heap of débris which it required hours to remove, and, strangely enough, the stones had fallen over her instead of upon her, so that there was scarcely a mark upon her to tell how she had died.

But she was dead, nevertheless; quite dead; and it should be noted here that Nick Carter saw to it personally that the remains of the beautiful mad girl were tenderly cared for to the end.

* * * * * * *

So ends the story of Scylla, the Siren—the beautiful mad woman.

There remains yet a word to say in reference to the *Plunger*, however.

She was found in the boathouse, intact.

Nothing about her had been injured, and that afternoon the *Nadja* steamed away to the westward, from which direction it presently returned, bringing with it the regular crew of the submarine, so that when she did at last return to her moorings from which she had so mysteriously disappeared it was reported that she had merely been away on a test, and the public knew nothing of the story of her escapade.

The story had not leaked out at all. There was nothing known of it beyond a few individuals, who kept their counsel, and Nick Carter's strangest adventure was known only to a few.

THE END.

The next issue, No. 467, will contain "The Man from Nevada; or, Nick Carter's Cowboy Client."

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CAUTION! **All readers of the Renowned Tip Top stories should beware of base imitations, placed upon the market under catch names very similar to Frank Merriwell, and intended to deceive.**

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